

House Republican Press Release

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HOUSE APPROVES INITIATIVE TO BETTER ADDRESS SUNKEN VESSELS



Initiative Cosponsored By Rep. Urban

On Tuesday, April 25, The House of Representatives approved an initiative cosponsored by State Rep. Diana Urban, R-North Stonington, that would increase the state's ability to recover sunken boats that have been abandoned. House Bill 5658, An Act Concerning The Removal Of Abandoned Sunken Vessels, now goes to the State Senate for consideration.

Under current law, owners or operators of a vessel who allow it to be broken or altered so that it will sink or ground or leaves any part of it in a river or harbor is subject to a fine of up to \$500, up to six months imprisonment, or both. The bill eliminates the criminal penalty and instead authorizes a duly authorized harbormaster to determine that a vessel is a "derelict vessel." Once the harbormaster makes this declaration, the Department of Transportation (DOT) or authorized representative of a municipality may cause the derelict vessel to be removed at the expense of the owner or operator. The bill makes the last owner of record responsible for the derelict vessel.

HB 5658 also establishes procedures to take a derelict vessel into custody after 24 hours and move it to a place of storage and allows for it to be sold. The procedures the bill establishes are similar to some of the procedures in the law governing towing of apparently abandoned or unregistered motor vehicles from public highways, but do not include a provision for a hearing to contest the validity of the seizure or the sale.

"This has been a continuous problem in Stonington as there was no clear chain of command for dealing with these vessels," said Rep. Urban, who also voted in favor of the bill as a member of Legislature's Environment Committee. "Often times they were left for extended periods of time and became impediments to navigation. This bill clarifies the procedures for identifying and expediting the removal of derelict vessels and should help make our waterways safer and cleaner."